

Congressman Elijah E. Cummings

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7th Congressional District of Maryland

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*A message from
Congressman Elijah E. Cummings*



It is both a privilege and honor to represent you in the United States Congress. While serving you, I will continue outreach efforts to further inform you of legislative action in Congress. I welcome your advice. Government "by the people" is the cornerstone of my legislative philosophy.

*Elijah E. Cummings
Member of Congress*

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Election Reform Legislation Pushed by Congressman Cummings Passes Both Houses

On October 16, the Senate passed the final bipartisan version of *H.R. 3295: Help America Vote Act of 2002*, a legislation heavily pushed by Congressman Cummings since the Election 2000 debacle almost two years ago. The House passed the final version of the bill a week earlier.

The landmark legislation touted as the "First Civil Right Legislation in the 21st Century," would authorize \$3.9 billion to upgrade election equipment and guarantee that all eligible voters are given the opportunity to cast a ballot.

"This bill is important because it will advance voting rights and ensure that every eligible citizen will have the right to vote," Congressman Cummings said. "Although the bill is not perfect, it is a necessary step in the right direction."

Expected to be signed by President Bush in the next few weeks, the bill accomplishes the following:

- **Mandates provisional voting,** which will allow those whose names do not appear on voter lists, to cast a provisional ballot which would be validated later. During Election 2000, it was estimated by civil rights groups that at least 3 million Americans were turned away from the polls because of registration problems.

- **Makes voting booths accessible to those with disabilities.** In the 2000 elections, at least 20 million voters were not able to cast a ballot because of inaccessibility at the polls.

- **Requires states to develop a uniform standard for counting ballots.**

If this legislation is enacted and funded, it will provide \$325 million for buying out punch-card and lever voting machines **and** \$325 million in automatic payments to states to improve election administration. Within this funding provision, the legislation guarantees that each state will receive at least \$5 million to upgrade its voting equipment.

"As we watched during Election 2000, the inconsistent procedures for counting ballots at various precincts put the democratic process on hold," Congressman Cummings noted.

Despite the legislation's milestones, Congressman Cummings expressed a few concerns about the legislation, especially with the provision that requires those who registered by mail to produce a driver's license or the last four digits of a social security number to be allowed to vote.

"The ID provisions would be burdensome to individuals such as the homeless, battered women, those with disabilities and even young people, who may not have a driver's license or utility bills in their own names," Congressman Cummings said. "Instead of encouraging democratic participation, this burdensome requirement may permanently turn these people away from voting."

Overall, Congressman Cummings said that this legislation will go a long way in averting another Election 2000 fiasco. Although the legislation would not effect the 2002 elections, the changes are expected to be in place for the 2004 Presidential Elections.

Congressman Cummings said, "It was the duty of this Congress to enact legislation to protect the voting rights of all Americans."

Congressman Cummings Secures Federal Grants for Police Integrity Programs

As a strong advocate for civil rights in law enforcement, Congressman Cummings secured \$175,000 in federal grants for several Maryland law enforcement agencies to implement programs that will build trust between the police and citizens.

Congressman Cummings worked with Senators Paul S. Sarbanes, Barbara A. Mikulski, and Congressman Benjamin L. Cardin to secure \$125,000 for the Baltimore Police Department; \$25,000 for Maryland Chiefs of Police Association; and \$25,000 for the Maryland Sheriff's Association.

The grants, which will come from the U.S. Department of Justice's Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program, will help recipients implement Police Integrity Programs that will address racial profiling, questionable police stops/ searches and use of force policies. The grants will also help develop civilian review boards and community-represented hiring programs.

"More than 10 years after the well-publicized police beating case of Rodney King, we once again saw similar images in the beating of 16-year-old Donovan Jackson, this past summer," Congressman Cummings said. "However, with these grants, we would be able to begin implementing methods for eliminating racial disparities in law enforcement."

House Reauthorizes Federally-Qualified Community Health Centers

Through the urging of Congressman Cummings and other House Democrats, the House passed a bill that would reauthorize federally-qualified community health centers that play a crucial role in providing more than 12 million Americans with affordable healthcare.

The bill, *H.R. 3450: The Health Care Safety Net Act*, authorized \$1.29 billion to fund community health centers in FY 2003, an increase from the \$802 million authorized for FY 2002.

Congressman Cummings said, "This legislation is important because community health clinics save lives. Everyday, 1,200 of these centers across the nation serve populations in low-income communities, regardless of the patients' insurance coverage."

operated by the community, have also made major progress in eliminating healthcare disparities, Congressman Cummings noted. For example, community health centers have reduced infant low birth weight (a condition associated with increased mortality) in African American patients by 50 percent. They have also significantly expanded the number of women receiving breast cancer examinations. In addition, nearly 90 percent of their African American patients who use the services of community health centers report that their blood pressure is under control.

"During a recent visit to a Baltimore's Total Health Care community health clinic, I was encouraged to learn that many clinics also provide seniors with discounts on prescription drugs," Congressman Cummings said.

The legislation also makes the following provisions:

- Allows health centers to form networks for purchasing medical supplies and technical services, saving thousands of dollars which could then be used to serve more patients.
- Gives newly-licensed physicians the opportunity to participate in the National Health Service Corp. which would allow them to pay off part of their medical school loans in return for serving in low-income areas.
- Reauthorizes funding for rural health outreach and development, including funding for telehealth/telemedicine programs.

"I applaud the House Leaders for making this a priority," Congressman Cummings said.

Note to Newsletter Recipients:

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